



advocacy | action | answers on aging

**National Association of
Area Agencies on Aging**

1100 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Suite 350
Washington, DC 20003

P 202.872.0888
F 202.872.0057

n4a.org

September 17, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Majority Leader
The Honorable Charles Schumer, Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker
The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of the country's 622 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and the more than 250 Title VI Native American aging programs, which the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) represents ***we implore Congress to advance another round of COVID-19 relief legislation that addresses the diverse needs of older Americans and their caregivers.*** As the coronavirus scourge persists, lawmakers must react to our ongoing national crisis with a robust, comprehensive strategy that mirrors—in scale, scope and content—the bipartisan relief passed earlier this year.

For the duration of this health and economic emergency, **AAAs, Title VI Native American aging programs and other vital Aging Network organizations have selflessly served on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic by meeting the needs of older adults who face significantly increased risks from the virus.** Relying on more than 55 years of expertise providing support to enable older Americans to stay safe and healthy in their homes, this nationwide network has efficiently and effectively responded to our new national reality and accommodated the dramatically growing need for aging services by deploying rapid-response innovations to address pandemic-related challenges.

Congress' initial actions to support older adults' safety and independence via emergency funding enabled the Aging Network to respond to rapidly increasing and evolving needs. Robust funding and added flexibility for Older Americans Act (OAA) nutrition services

included in the Families First and CARES Acts, and CARES Act funding for OAA supportive services, family caregiver supports, and long-term care ombudsman and elder justice activities was an essential factor fueling the Network's expediency in the early days of the pandemic. Unfortunately, that vital funding is depleted or will be very soon, but the elevated needs of older Americans persist in this pandemic. ***We urgently entreat federal lawmakers to pass additional support for policies and programs that enable older adults to remain safely in their homes and to avoid especially risky medical and institutional care settings.***

Legislative Delay is Unacceptable in the Face of Ongoing Suffering Among Older Americans

The case for additional funding is clear. In a survey of n4a members released earlier this summer, [#AAAsAtWork for Older Adults: A Snapshot of Area Agency on Aging Responses to COVID-19](#), 93 percent of respondents reported serving more clients since the pandemic began, and 69 percent saw an increase in demand for their services among existing clients. The services that saw the greatest increase in demand include home-delivered meals, telephone reassurance and wellness checks, information and referral assistance, and caregiver supports. In the months since AAAs reported drastically increased demand for these and other home and community-based services, older adults' needs have persisted, but funding has not. State budget challenges in the wake of the pandemic's economic fallout has further strained an already underfunded network. ***Therefore, additional immediate emergency federal funding for the Aging Network is instrumental in enabling AAAs and other aging services providers to continue to meet health, safety and community needs of older Americans and their caregivers.***

We understand the political challenges and fiscal concerns facing Congress and the Administration as the pandemic's health, economic and social ramifications endure. However, addressing and alleviating suffering among our nation's most vulnerable populations must trump partisan posturing. ***Fortunately, providing additional emergency funding for Older Americans Act and other vital aging programs has both bipartisan and bicameral support among [Senate](#) and [House](#) lawmakers, and we urge congressional leaders to implement these funding recommendations [promoted by multiple national aging advocacy organizations](#) and included in these broadly supported Dear Colleague letters.***

Additional Aging Policy Priorities to Incorporate into Urgently Needed Coronavirus Relief Legislation

More than six months into the national health and economic emergency catalyzed by a deadly virus and protracted by inadequate federal response measures, we know that there are a number of important policy proposals necessary to ease prolonged pain among older Americans.

In addition to vital funding for Older Americans Act programs, we urge lawmakers to adopt policy recommendations included in n4a's [April 12](#) and [May 28](#) letters. These important proposals include:

- **Incorporate the Strengthening Social Connections Act of 2020, [S. 4477/H.R. 8026](#) in coronavirus relief legislation.** This important, [n4a-endorsed](#) bill deploys expanded authorities included in March's unanimously approved Supporting Older Americans Act of 2020, P.L. 116-131, to provide emergency supplemental funding to programs that strengthen social connectedness and address the negative health effects of social isolation among older adults who are particularly at risk of adverse consequences of social isolation and loneliness as the pandemic persists and stay-at-home recommendations continue. The need for this funding is obvious. Among AAAs [surveyed in mid-May](#), 60 percent were already seeing the negative health effects of social isolation among clients. *While all AAAs are actively working to address this issue, much more needs to be done given the staggering size of the problem.*
- **Implement funding increases and policy changes for Medicaid and Medicaid home and community-based services (HCBS) waiver programs** to ensure that state Medicaid officials and HCBS service providers can sustain and increase HCBS options during the enduring pandemic. Eighty percent of AAAs partner with Medicaid, including a majority that are involved in delivering Medicaid home and community-based services (HCBS)¹ waiver programs. HCBS options are essential to ensuring that, nationally, a majority of older adults and people with disabilities who require an institutional level of care can remain in their homes and communities. The coronavirus pandemic has starkly established the importance of ensuring that these populations have safer at-home services options, but without additional federal support these waiver programs are likely to be cut first by states facing dire budget realities. *We urge lawmakers to adopt the House-passed 14 percentage-point bump in the federal Medicaid allocation and 10 percentage-point increase for Medicaid HCBS waiver programs to ensure that the health and economic crises related to COVID-19 do not force states to choose between the health of their populations and other essential investments in state services.*
- **Provide ongoing financial relief to states, communities and other essential safety net systems** that have been especially hard hit from the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic to ensure that these systems—and the aging programs they support—are not subject to future devastating funding cuts. With stay-at-home orders shuttering businesses and concerns about health leading to wide-spread layoffs, state tax revenues have tumbled at the same time that state unemployment insurance and health care costs are skyrocketing. *Consequently, we support the state, local and tribal government funding included in the HEROES Act and urge Congress to incorporate*

¹ [2020 National Survey of Area Agencies on Aging Report](#), July 2020.

important state and local government funds to ease budget shortfalls that will hit vulnerable populations, including older Americans, particularly hard. Additionally, we urge lawmakers to include additional emergency funding for vital federal block-grant programs, including the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), and life-sustaining food assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Enacting these investments will bolster the ability of our nation to mitigate the devastating economic and health effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

Nationally, we are at a critical juncture. Without further federal legislative leadership and action to advance additional supports to vital community-based aging and health care programs, older adults and their caregivers will endure unnecessary, preventable suffering spurred by an unforeseen pandemic but exacerbated by political stalemate. ***The time to act is now. We implore lawmakers to eschew partisan divides and prioritize older Americans by passing meaningful, substantial coronavirus relief legislation.*** Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or n4a's policy staff at 202.872.0888.

Sincerely,



Sandy Markwood
Chief Executive Officer

cc:

Members of the U.S. Senate

Members of the U.S. House of Representatives